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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 006995

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SUBJECT: YOUNG FRENCH MUSLIM LEADER HIGHLIGHTS GENERATIONAL  
DIVIDE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt  
for reasons 1.4(b)(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Ahmed Gouffi, a young French-born Muslim civic leader, criticized the leaders of France's main Muslim organizations as out of touch with young Muslims born in France. His comments echo those of other young French Muslim contacts, and highlight a generational divide between French-born Muslims and their immigrant parents and grandparents. During several meetings with Poloff, which included a walking tour of his northern Paris suburb and a meeting with his town's mayor, Gouffi concluded that French Muslims will not be fully accepted by, or integrated into, French society until a new generation of French-born Muslims takes leadership positions in France's Muslim organizations. He added that his generation of French-born Muslims is distinct from their parents and grandparents because they are more vocal in asserting their French identity. Gouffi said that while earlier immigrants came to France to find employment and largely remained silent on political issues, his generation of French-born Muslims is demanding acceptance as equal French citizens from French society and a more active role in the nation's political life. END SUMMARY.

GENERATIONAL DIVIDE: "OUR MUSLIM LEADERS WERE NOT BORN IN FRANCE, AND THEY HAVE ACCENTS"

12. (C) The loudest cheers during an October 12 "iftar" sponsored by the National Federation of French Muslims (FNMF) in the ethnically mixed suburb of Clichy-la-Garenne north of Paris went to Ahmed Gouffi, a young French-born Muslim of Algerian descent, who provoked a sustained ovation with an emotional address about discrimination he said Muslims face in France. Citing the recent release of the film "Indigenes," which celebrates the role of African soldiers from France's colonies who helped liberate France during World War II, Gouffi declared: "Now the whole world knows what our fathers and grandfathers did for France." Gouffi, who is director of the technical services division of a local housing agency, is active in his community and serves on a wide range of municipal projects meant to improve the lives of local residents. His involvement in the development of a new Muslim cultural center was mentioned during an October 23 Eid al-Fitr prayer service, marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, in the suburbs north of Paris that drew over 1,000 people.

13. (C) During several meetings with Poloff over the course of Ramadan, Gouffi harshly criticized FNMF President Mohammed Bechari and other prominent French Muslim leaders as being "out of touch" with French-born Muslims, particularly younger people. "I listen to them talk and I cover my face with my hands," he said. "They can't speak French well. They have accents. They don't understand France, and they weren't born

here," he declared. "How can they speak for us?" he asked. He noted that Bechari was introduced at the "iftar" in Arabic, and explained that he and many French-born Muslims do not speak Arabic well. Gouffi pointed to well-publicized tensions between organizations dominated by different ethnic groups in the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) as evidence that the current generation of French Muslim leaders has not fully integrated into French society. "Look at them, their heads are still in Algeria and Morocco," he noted dismissively. "So often I will see something happen, and I will want to tell them: 'Look, you are not in Algeria anymore, and we can't do things like that anymore.'"

¶4. (C) Gouffi's comments mirror those of other young French-born Muslims. For example, a Franco-Tunisian university student recently told us that he and his friends have "very different ideas" than imams and Muslim leaders at many of France's major mosques who were not born in France, including Paris Grand Mosque Rector and CFCM President Dalil Boubakeur, who was born in Algeria. At the October 24 Eid al-Fitr prayer service, several young men sitting near Poloff mocked the accents of speakers, several of whom appeared more comfortable speaking in Arabic, when they spoke French. "Ah, what are you trying to say, I understand nothing," one young man whispered in response to a speaker while his friends laughed. Gouffi and other young French-born Muslims state that France's Muslims will not be fully accepted by, nor integrated into, French society until their leaders and spokespeople are Muslims who were born and raised in France. They often point to Minister of Equal Opportunities Azouz Begag, who is of Algerian descent but was born in France, as a role model for French Muslims who want to integrate into French society while remaining proud of their cultural heritage. Gouffi, whose civic involvement has gained

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recognition beyond Clichy-la-Garenne, stated that he knows the minister and respects him. "I have worked with Begag on some projects, and he is good," Gouffi said.

#### YOUNGER GENERATION OF FRENCH MUSLIMS MORE ASSERTIVE IN CLAIMING FRENCH IDENTITY

¶5. (C) Gouffi stated that his generation of French-born Muslims is distinct from their parents and grandparents because the younger generation is more vocal in asserting their French identity, and in demanding equal political and social rights. "My parents came here to find a job, and were happy just to work. They kept their mouths shut," Gouffi explained. "But the young people now are different because they are demanding acceptance by France, and want to have the same chances as everybody else," he said. He declared that his generation has greater expectations from French society, and wants to play a more active role in the country's political process. "We're not going to be quiet like our parents were, and when we have a problem with something we let people know," Gouffi said. "I think France has noticed us now."

#### YOUNG MUSLIM LEADER CONTEMPLATES HIGHER GOALS . . .

¶6. (C) Gouffi is not shy about his aspirations to become more involved in his community. Giving Poloff a walking tour of the suburb of Clichy-la-Garenne, Gouffi explained that he was raised "in a violent suburb" of Lyon in southeastern France. He often cites his patriotism for France and his love for Clichy-la-Garenne. During the tour, he came across many friends and acquaintances, kissing non-Muslim women on both cheeks in greeting while simply putting his hand on his heart when he came across several Muslim female acquaintances. Similarly, he alternated between shaking the hands of non-Arab men while kissing Arab male acquaintances in a traditional greeting. The outgoing Gouffi, whom one acquaintance described as "knowing everyone in this town," took obvious pride in his ability to connect with Clichy citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. He stressed that he

"wants to be friends with everyone, not just Muslims or Arabs." At city hall, Gouffi walked into Mayor Gilles Catoire's office without an appointment, introducing Poloff to the mayor and his chief-of-staff, Philippe Palomo. The mayor praised Gouffi's involvement in the community, citing him as an example of the civic responsibility he said he hopes to see among his city's younger generation.

. . . BUT WORRIES ABOUT RACISM

17. (C) When Poloff asked Gouffi following the meeting with the mayor whether he plans to run for elective office, however, Gouffi responded with ambivalence. Often discussing the lack of elected representatives of Arab descent in France, Gouffi noted that the non-Muslim mayor has been in office for 25 years "like a mayor in Algeria." Nodding when a friend in a coffeeshop stated that the French principles of "liberty, equality, and fraternity can seem like hypocrisy" to those who feel discriminated against in France, Gouffi acknowledged doubts about whether he could ascend to a position like the mayor's. While remaining optimistic about the ability of his generation of French Muslims to integrate and succeed in France, he maintained that there are still glass ceilings for those who do not strive hard enough to integrate fully into French society. Stating that he believes he has been denied job interviews because his first name is "Ahmed," a commonly recognizable Arab name, Gouffi concluded: "If I have a son, I don't think I would name him Ahmed or Mohammed. Those names are too Muslim. I think I have been denied jobs because of my name, and I don't want to put my kids through that."

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